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ABSTRACT

A 4-week Sequenced Peer Teaching program for experienced faculty members of Ohlone College (California) was designed to bring faculty together for the development and/or improvement of teaching. The program included the teaching of a sequence of assignments by individual participants to a class of peers. The teaching was video-taped and replayed for group critique; assignments varied in complexity; emphasis was on teaching in a setting less complex than a classroom; interaction stressed candor; participants included faculty (mixed by sex and subject matter), administrators, and an outside facilitator. A basic premise was that the presenter should have maximum freedom within an assignment. Group discussions dealt with relationships with students, communication, instructional strategies, content, and the self-concept of the instructor. The different phases of the project and participants' reactions to them are explained. The project was judged successful by the participants, who become more aware of their own teaching and more self-critical of classroom work, and who developed feelings of rapport across departmental lines. Vigorous faculty leadership is needed to launch and maintain similar projects. For an earlier report on this program the reader may see ED 047 672. (CA)

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# "Peer Teaching at Ohlone"

by
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## Introduction:

Faculty development is a concern of growing importance. Many colleges are seeking ways to foster continuing growth of faculty in such vital areas as curriculum design, instructional strategies, communication skills and interpersonal relations. The trend toward comprehensive in-service programs signals a realization that a key contributor to organizational resilience will be the faculty member who can meet new problems with new approaches.

As an initial step in developing a long range comprehensive program for faculty development, the faculty and administration of Ohlone College in Fremont, California conducted a Sequenced Peer Teaching (SPT) workshop. This article is a report of the Ohlone College SPT project. Other colleges exploring models for a comprehensive program for faculty development may find the SPT approach as useful as it was at Ohlone where the preliminary outcomes were positive and encouraging.

## Ohlone College:

Ohlone College is a relatively small suburban community college in its fourth year of operation with an enrollment of about 2,000 day students and 42 full-time faculty members. At Ohlone, faculty members and administrators embrace the concept of the open door comprehensive community college with its commitment to excellence in instruction and concern for students. Many share a concern for faculty development. The College was receptive to the project despite its novelty.

## What is SPT?

Sequenced Peer Teaching is a program designed to bring faculty colleagues together for development of teaching. Structurally, the program rests on the small group. The basic process is the teaching of a sequence of assignments by individual participants to a "class" of peers. The teaching is video taped

and replayed for group critique. The assignments move from brief, simple initial presentations to longer, complex presentations. SPT emphasizes teaching to peers in a setting less complex than that of the classroom. In the SPT group, threat and anxiety are minimized, as interaction stresses candor. Participants include faculty, administrators and a facilitator, usually from outside the college. Table I sets out the phases of the program which spanned four weeks, the greatest proportion of activity being during peer teaching days.

Table I

Calendar for Sequenced Peer Teaching Workshop

Phase I: Informational and Planning Meetings

Phase II: First Day of Peer Teaching

Session One: Introduction and over view
First sequence; 2-3 minutes, "self-introduction" and critique

Session Two: Second sequence; 3-5 minutes, "Explication of a Concept" and critique

Phase III: Campus Activities (two weeks)
Video taping in classroom setting
Observing

Phase IV: Second Day of Peer Teaching

Session Three: Third sequence; 9-10 minutes, "Extended teaching" and critique

Session Four: Playback of classroom video tapes and critique

The basic concept grew from experience in pre-service preparation of instructors at the University of California, Berkeley. In particular, the Cooperative Internship Program found the approach helpful in preparing interns for their initial community college teaching assignments. The Ohlone College project, was the first time the program was used by experienced faculty members.

The SPT project was not framed in an experimental design. Data for this report comes from reports and questionnaires from participants and the analysis of video tapes made of the sessions.

Goals for the SPT Project:

Conceived as an activity preliminary to a larger program of faculty development, these goals were set for the SPT program:

1) Encouragement of faculty to use video taping as part of classroom instruction
2) Encouragement of the use of in-class video tapes for analysis of instruction
3) Development of a foundation for peer interaction for improvement of instruction
4) Development of skills and processes for the observation, description and analysis of instruction
5) Identification and reinforcement of effective instruction
6) Identification and modification of ineffective instruction

Preliminaries:

Because of the novelty of the project and its threatening aspects, several informational meetings were held after an initial interest in the program was elicited by Ohlone's Director of Arts and Sciences, who distributed written materials about the program and discussed the feasibility of the concept with numerous faculty members. It was recognized that the project would have to become the shared concern and responsibility of faculty, administrators, and facilitators, so joint planning and decision making was incorporated into the processes. At the Phase I meetings, groundwork for the joint undertaking was laid and an agreement on purpose was achieved. Basic ground rules and procedures were outlined. For instance, it was stipulated that participation would be

voluntary and that no reports of an evaluative nature would be sent forward from the group sessions. Group size, it was agreed, would be between 8 and 10, and that in the groups, there would be participants only (no observers). Administrators were invited to join the groups, contingent upon participation in the assignments. The coordination of equipment, space, funds and materials was undertaken by the Director of Arts and Sciences, thus avoiding troublesome mechanical, logistical problems.

At the initial meetings, it was apparent that many of the prospective participants experienced an anticipatory anxiety, which found expression in a concern for "seeing myself on TV," or "what will my colleagues think of me." The full nature of the anxiety, its orgins, and means of its mitigation is not fully known at this point, but it was undoubtedly a key factor in the attrition of faculty who expressed an initial interest, as well as others who avoided the project.

Seven faculty actually began the program. With the administrator and co-facilitators, the group numbered ten. Represented in the group was an array of teaching areas: History, women's P.E., chemistry, biology, accounting, psychology and counseling. Seven were male, 3 female. In age and teaching experience, there were only slight differences. By and large, participants shared a concern for good teaching, an interest in video-taping, and an openness and willingness to interact with colleagues.

THE FIRST DAY: SESSIONS ONE AND TWO

Session One: To begin the first session, the facilitators presented the plan for the SPT workshop and outlined the anticipated outcomes. The group reviewed and added to previously agreed upon ground rules. Prior to the first assignment, which was to speak for 2-3 minutes on "What I Teach," the facilitator took an

initially directive role by pointing out particular areas for observation. Group members were asked to be alert to aspects of communication, such as non-verbal communication and double messages. In the realm of content, attention was called to aspects such as continuity, cogency, appropriateness of examples, metaphors, graphics and illustrations. It was suggested that attention be paid to inflection, phrasing, volume, choice of words and other aspects of delivery. In the area of interaction with the peer class, aspects of questioning, answering questions, eye to eye contact were suggested as points for observation. As to process, it was suggested that the presenter be the first to comment upon his presentation, and that he could request the group for perceptions of any aspect of interest to him. Further, it was agreed that the critiquing of presentations would stay sharply focussed on the presentation itself. This ground rule proved to be effective in keeping the discussions crisp and to the point, and discouraged lengthy discourses on "how I teach my classes," or the baneful "show and tell" phenomenon that plagues so many professional seminars. The group recognized that the "here and now" provided data accessible to all group members, while reports from the "then and there" tended to detract from the interaction. That participants experienced nervousness and tension was apparent. An initial item for group work was the acknowledgement of this emotional context. Acknowledging this shared state, speeded the process of melding as a group. Later, reflecting on the SPT workshop, a participant reported on the development of the "we" feeling; "I feel as though we shared something which makes the rest of the faculty something of an outsider."

The first session served an introductory purpose. Participants shared the common experience of taping and group cirtique. The session afforded the opportunity to begin the evolution of conventions for interaction, as they grew from experience. One instructor displayed a communication trait that was

in part self-defeating. His discourse tended toward self-interruption because of a tendency to link together phrases in a branching manner that carried him farther and farther from his intent. Interestingly, his delivery progressively became more muffled and diffident as the branching went on. This instance gave the group an opportunity to share perceptions with the instructor, whose positive and accepting response reinforced the emerging conventions for candid feedback. During the first session all participants had the opportunity to see themselves on the screen. The "cosmetic effect", the mixed reaction to seeing oneself - was dealt with. The first session ended with an explanation of the assignment for the afternoon session. Participants were asked to choose a concept from their own field, for a 4-5 minute explication. Further, they were asked to build into their presentation a means of obtaining feedback from the group that would enable them to gauge their success in teaching. Specifically, the explication of a concept was assigned in order to put the presenters in the framework of a common task, that of developing an abstraction with appropriate illustrations and examples. No specification was made as to the skills the presenters were to use, nor was re-teaching stipulated. These conditions, in addition to the absence of role playing, illustrate key distinctions between SPT and micro-teaching. A basic premise of SPT is that the presenter should have maximum freedom within an assignment. Thus, his style was as "natural" as possible (given the constraints of the situation), and his opportunity of self discovery enhanced.

Session Two: Upon reconvening, the group began taping. A playback procedure was agreed upon, whereby playback and critiques would follow each presentation. At this point the facilitator contributed to the "work" of the group by pressing it to maintain its time schedule. "Ecology," "health", "chattel slavery," "normal

distribution," and "behavioral objectives" were among the concepts taught. The concept assignment provided abundant data for critiquing and feedback. Initially the group tended to find praiseworthy aspects, in one anothers teaching, even though the observations might not have profound import. For instance, one instructor's eloquent use of physical gestures was praised, as was another's skillful use of chalkboard graphics.. Still another's animated and witty discourse was perceived favorably, as was another's relaxed and personable manner of address. During this phase, the group continued the essential work of building a basis for giving feedback, and of helping each other overcome remaining anxieties of teaching before peers.

As a group, the presenters tended to try to say too much in the time allotted, and most assumed too much prior knowledge on the part of the learners. The implications for classroom teaching are obvious.

Insights were gained on the effect of inadvertent non-verbal communication. For example, one instructor ended the presentation by asking, "Any questions?" But her stern facial expression as well as her severe intonation clearly communicated, "Any questions?...ask if you dare". Another instructor demonstrated the "double message." She introduced her concept by inviting the group to offer definitions and wrote these contributions on the board. The first message was, apparently, an invitation for devergent thinking, (what do you think a definition of "health" would be?) which would then be synthesized in class dialogue. However, after receiving definitions, she wrote out her own pre-established definition and ignored the other definitions. Upon viewing the tape, she saw that her invitation for divergent thinking, was contradicted by her action, which testified to a convergent intent. Of the group, several expressed the experience of frustration and resentment at being led into a game of "read my mind."

These examples illustrate the content of the interactions early in the experience of the group. They are not offered as proof of changed teacher behavior. Indeed, it is most unlikely that thorough going change will come to an individual who simply sees in himself tendencies toward double messages, self-interruption, or selective perception of questions. But the awareness of such traits is heightened by the high impact message of the video tape itself and the feedback of colleagues. The awareness can be carried into the classroom, and mark the beginning of change. One participant said on this point, "I think the program has caused me to be sure to think about <u>how</u>...what I say and do gets across, not only <u>what</u> I say and do."

The second session of the first day concluded with the group reflecting on the day's events. For an assignment during the two week period before the second day's workshop, participants were encouraged to video tape their own classes and to edit out selected segments for showing during the last session. For the second day, the assignment was an extended presentation of 9-10 minutes on a topic of the presenter's choice using as many teaching strategies as would be appropriate.

THE SECOND DAY: SESSIONS THREE AND FOUR

<u>Session Three:</u> At the outset of the third session, ground rules were reviewed and modified where appropriate. It was agreed that the non-teaching participants would be the last to present, and if time were short, they would defer. This modification of the basic agreement...that all participate...was probably possible because all members of the group, teaching and non-teaching had "bought into" the process on the first day.

Aspects of observation and group interaction were discussed. An anxiety and concern for colleague opinion continued, but to a much lesser degree for all but a few of the participants. Members reported on their own heightened self-

awareness in the classroom with implications for their own instruction. Four had made video tapes of classroom sessions.

With the extended time of the assignment, content became more prominent, though attention remained focussed on aspects of communication. Topics presented included, "schizophrenia," "account balancing," "the nation state," "temperature," and "shooting the bow and arrow."

Subtle aspects of instruction came into sharper focus with the extended assignment. For example, in developing the concept of the nation state, an instructor's use of a symbolic graphic, his lively and witty style of discourse, and "body language" were perceived as contributing to the success of his lesson. At the same time, several members brought to his attention the confusing manner in which the abstract ideas comingled with concrete examples, to the extent that the direction of the discourse was lost from time to time.

In another instance, a chemistry instructor gave a presentation on temperature. His delivery was perceived as consistent with his intent. However, several of the group did not understand the metaphors he used to describe the motion of molecules. For several, the level of abstraction rendered the presentation unclear until a graphic was drawn on the board depicting the evaporation of water. At that point, understanding was achieved for most of the learners.

In these instances, as in others, the playbacks opened up innumerable avenues for fruitful discussion. By mutual accord, the convention of confining discussion to the presentation per se was modified to accept related and relevant topics, as the immediate interests and needs of the presenter and the group arose. Discussions dealt with communication and instructional strategies, content, relations with students, self-concept of the instructor, assumptions about learning styles of students, and other topics.

During the latter part of the afternoon, segments of the tapes made in class were shown and critiqued.

Conclusions and Commenting:

The Ohlone project in SPT was judged successful by the participants. Important goals were achieved, and a foundation was laid down for a continuing program in faculty development. Considering the limited amount of time and resources available, the success of the project was all the more encouraging for the SPT approach. As of now, Ohlone College is looking to further planning and implementation of a broad gauge program.

Although SPT was never regarded as a panacea for faculty development, it clearly served certain goals very well. For the attainment of other goals, such as the development of a systematic program for the observation and analysis of instruction, the Ohlone College experience was only suggestive of possibilities. Further, as designed, SPT could not function as an encounter group, though there is a need for such groups in a comprehensive program of faculty development.

Positive outcomes can be enumerated. Participants reported on the value to them of the recognition and positive reinforcement for effective instruction. Appreciation was also expressed for the opportunity to see "how it's done" in a variety of instructional areas. Participants developed an awareness of their own teaching, with the consequence that they became more self-critical of their classroom work. Skill in critiquing developed, as did skill in the communication and reception of feedback. Pariticipants did become familiar with the equipment, and almost all of them brought it into their classroom.

The SPT workshops brought a feeling of rapport across departmental lines. To this point, one participant reported:

> "I'm glad the group was cross-discipline. My colleagues are nice, kind people after all! Having an administrator in the group was good...it served to remind me that they are "real people"...If this experience has not improved my teaching, it has improved my

understanding of the others in the group and I have a "good feeling" about, and I "care" about all of them."

Refinements in the basic SPT model are suggested by the Ohlone project. Groups should number 5-7, for consideration of time and interactions. After several hours of taping, replay and critique, fatigue became an important factor because of the intense interest in the process and energies expended by the group. Feedback is enriched by constituting the groups from a mix of the faculty and staff cutting across lines of subject matter, organizational roles, experience, age, race, ethnicity and sex.

Issues and Problems:

How to make SPT an appealing activity for the faculty at large remains a problem. Perhaps, some faculty will never see value in such projects. Others agonize over teaching before peers to the extent of excluding themselves. Greater participation may come as the result of an improved incentive system. SPT type of in-service work might be defined as an integral part of the ordinary pattern of professional life, and adjustments in load, time, reward, status and role made accordingly. It is apparent that as long as such programs are added to an already heavy burden, the level of participation will be low, and likely, the participants will be among those who are already doing a superior job.

How to reduce anticipatory anxiety remains a problem. Paradoxically, it appears that the best antidote is a gratifying initial experience. Participants recalled that their feelings, prior to video taping, were "enthusiasm and trepidation," and "very nervous - afraid to teach in front of my peers," and, "some anxiety--mainly centered on how well I would perform, with the fear that I would be less highly regarded because I might not perform well." With each session though,

participants became more at ease. One said, "As we began, I settled into the reality of simply acting naturally and trying to learn, not trying to make impressions. With this feeling came real pleasure in the experience." By the last session, the anxiety had lessened considerably, though the presentations were made with no less seriousness.

How to launch and maintain an SPT project is a problem touching on the issue of faculty role in governance. Manifestly, vigorous leadership is needed. Typically, this kind of work falls into the domain of the administrative staff. Yet, for it to do so could bring an unwelcome shift in the spirit of the program. SPT should be something that the faculty <u>does</u>, not something that is <u>done to them</u>.

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